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THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR FOREIGN OCCUPATION

Written statement* submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 December 1999]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

The peoples of French Guyana and the French West Indies

1. Although the last vestiges of imperial rule are fading into history (return of Hong Kong and Macau to China, return of the Panama Canal, etc.), and foreign occupation is the object of almost universal condemnation and negotiation aimed at bringing it to an end (the Golan, southern Lebanon, the West Bank, etc.), certain peoples are still being denied the right to self-determination.

2. Such is the case of the peoples of French Guyana and the French West Indies, which have been artificially granted the status of "departments" within the French Republic. This departmental status, which has existed for 53 years, has stifled the healthy development of an independent ethnic culture distinct from that of France. Half of the population lives in a lopsided and still underdeveloped economy, relying solely on social benefits from a State that is unable to guarantee the constitutionally enshrined right to work.

3. Integration is imposed without assimilation. It is time for France to recognize the existence of peoples in French Guyana and the French West Indies whose identity is the result of a history of slavery and colonization and a specific culture. France therefore has a duty to allow its overseas populations to freely determine their future following an open dialogue between all the parties concerned. The adoption of stopgap economic measures not only represents a refusal to respect the fundamental and universally recognized right to self-determination but also stores up costly and tragic human consequences for the future.